

US seeking sign Soviets want better relations

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WASHINGTON - The Administration hopes to determine within the next month or two if the new Soviet leadership will take concrete actions to improve relations significantly.

If quiet diplomatic explorations now under way show enough promise, top officials say, there is a possibility of a meeting between Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko in the early summer, to be followed by a summit between President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Konstantin U. Chernenko in late summer.

"The President does not want a summit just to be having a summit," one top planner said. "But if something could be solved at the summit or at least if progress could be made, that would meet our criteria."

Senior officials say progress could come on either nuclear arms control or on a series of smaller issues that are being discussed.

Against the possibility the Russians might suddenly take up the United States on its expressed willingness to offer more flexible positions on strategic arms reductions, the White House twice last week held meetings of the Senior Arms Control Policy Group to consider options worked up over the last several months within the bureaucracy.

Ranking planners say the United States would prefer that if a

summit is held it should aim at achieving a political decision on a common formula for resuming Strategic Arms Reduction Talks in Geneva.

They say, however, that if Moscow is reluctant to resume those negotiations - having made such a fuss about walking out of Geneva after the deployment of Pershing 2 and cruise missiles in Europe - the United States would be willing to consider some other forum.

Lesser issues

In the event the Soviet Union doesn't want to resume nuclear arms talks until after the presidential election, the Administration is prepared for a summit aimed at agreeing on a package of lesser issues.

Among those already being explored with the Soviet Union:

- An upgrade in the hot line to enable encrypted maps and documents to be transmitted between Washington and Moscow in a crisis. At present only telegraphic messages may be sent.

- A new cultural and educational exchange agreement significantly increasing visits between the two nations.

- Improved navigational aids in Soviet Asia to decrease the chances of another incident such as the one in which a Korean airliner was shot down last September.

- A consular agreement enabling the Russians to open a consulate in New York and the United States one in Kiev, and improved procedures whereby each country would inform the other if any of their nationals get into trouble while traveling.

- Agreement on on-site inspection not only of the destruction of chemical warfare weapons, but also of suspected production facilities and storage sites. The United States will soon offer a treaty to ban lethal chemical weapons.

- Agreement to modify draft treaties on a threshold test ban and peaceful nuclear explosions to permit on-site inspection of nuclear detonations. The new treaties would be submitted to the Senate for ratification.

- Agreement on some of the so-called confidence-building measures being considered in talks in Stockholm on issues such as advance notification of major military exercises.

"We're engaging them in a dialogue on all these things, or at least proposing to," one senior official said. "That's why I think it'll take a couple of months before we can make a judgment."

Administration officials say they are mildly encouraged about the possibility for improved relations since the ascension of Chernenko as general secretary of the Communist Party and head of the Soviet Defense Council.

They say the calling of a meeting of the Supreme Soviet, or parliament, for April 11 - more than a month early - may be a sign that Chernenko is about to get the third hat of leadership, that of the presidency. Actually the title is chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

Assuming the presidency would indicate that Chernenko is clearly in charge. It took Yuri Andropov seven months until he got his third hat of leadership.

There are several analysts give for thinking Chernenko may, for personal and policy reasons, want both a summit and improved relations.

First it would improve Chernenko's image and prestige if he met as chief of state with the American president and took steps seen as moving back toward some sort of detente relation-

ship - which he keeps saying he wants.

Even in his own society, he is seen as a bag carrier for Leonid Brezhnev and a man who cannot deliver a speech without slurring his words and sometimes losing his place and skipping whole passages. "Face is very important to the Russians," one analyst notes.

A substantive and successful summit meeting would enhance his standing as a leader. It would do the same thing for Reagan, not an unimportant consideration in his re-election bid.

But beyond the personal factor, American analysts say the Soviet Union could use what one official calls "a breathing space."

Economic factor

To improve its economy, the Soviet Union must provide more consumer goods as incentives for factory workers and farmers to work harder. Decreased defense spending resulting from arms control agreements would help.

Improved relations would permit the purchase of more automated equipment from the West to improve productivity.

Particularly if it appears Reagan will be re-elected, the Soviets can expect continued high spending on defense generally and on new strategic arms, providing a major challenge for Soviet technology. Arms control agreements could constrain the technological challenge, by constraining the forces of both sides.



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